

MUNICIPAL FAMILY POLICY AND WORK-FAMILY ARTICULATION: THE CASE OF FIVE QUEBEC MUNICIPALITIES¹

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Abstract.

The Province of Quebec leads North America in terms of family policy development. In 2004, municipal actors were invited to develop family policies at the municipal level. This article examines how municipal actors have endorsed those objectives, especially in the perspective of the work-family balance. The perspective chosen is borrowed in part from the time synchronization policies developed at the municipal level in some European countries, in particular Italy and France, but also from the objectives put forward by the Quebec government. This paper examines whether municipal actors have actually underwritten this new political responsibility, and finds that the temporal approach and work-family articulation is echoed in only a small percentage of the municipal family policy documents. The authors have investigated more closely the cases of five municipalities amongst the few where this theme is present. The research leads to conclude that the work-family focus remains underdeveloped in these municipal policies and none of the five municipalities had yet implemented a truly cross-cutting European-style 'time policy'. The authors offer an explanation for this situation.

Key Words: Regional Development Planning and Policy, Regional Government Analysis, Political Economy

JEL-Codes: R58, R5, P16.

Résumé. La politique familiale des municipalités et l'articulation entre famille et travail : Le cas de cinq municipalités au Québec.

La province de Québec est le chef de file en Amérique du Nord du point de vue du développement de la politique familiale. En 2004, les acteurs municipaux ont été invités à élaborer des politiques familiales à l'échelle municipale afin de marquer l'intérêt des municipalités pour cette question. Cet article étudie comment les acteurs municipaux ont tenu compte des objectifs de la politique familiale municipale, notamment s'ils s'y intéressent du point de vue de la conciliation emploi-famille. Les politiques sont analysées en fonction des objectifs du gouvernement du Québec, mais aussi des bureaux des temps mis en place dans des municipalités en Europe, surtout en Italie et en France. L'article évalue dans quelle mesure les acteurs municipaux se sont intéressés à cette nouvelle responsabilité de la conciliation des responsabilités familiale et professionnelle et constate que cette thématique est peu présente dans les politiques familiales municipales. Afin de mieux comprendre pourquoi cette thématique est si peu présente dans les politiques familiales municipales, alors qu'elle fait l'objet de nombreux débats au Québec, les auteurs ont étudié plus en détail les cas de cinq municipalités où ce thème est présent. La recherche

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conduit à la conclusion que l'orientation vers une meilleure conciliation emploi-famille est peu développée dans les politiques familiales municipales et aucune des cinq municipalités n'avait adopté une politique de type "bureau des temps" à l'européenne, ou une politique de gestion de temps à l'échelle municipale.

Mots-clés : Planification et politique pour le développement régional, analyse de gouvernement régional, économie politique

Codes JEL : R58, R5, P16.

Introduction

This article examines how family policies are managed at the municipal level and centers on the work-family articulation issue, as it is considered central in addressing the issue at the municipal level, as research on European Time Offices has shown (Boulin, 1997). Indeed, while municipal family policies may address other issues, such as leisure and community activities or transportation, the importance of the debates on working time and their articulation with family time has brought this issue to the forefront of academic debates on the role of various actors, including the municipal actor, in work-family issues. Our analysis will thus focus here mainly on initiatives related to work-family balance, since they are considered crucial to sustainable development of local and regional communities, and we would thus expect them to appear in municipal family policies developed in Quebec. First, we will present Quebec's provincial family policy in order to situate the municipal level in this context, and we will place the provincial policy in perspective with models that prevail in other Western countries (Europe and North America). We briefly revisit the development of family policies in Quebec since the early 1980s and then the study focuses on the work-family balance issue in the context of municipal family policies, since our objective is to evaluate to what extent the municipal level has managed to incorporate preoccupations for work-family articulation into the family policies designed at this level.

Since the adoption of its explicit family policy in the late 1980s, the Province of Quebec has no doubt set itself apart among Canadian provinces and American states. With regard to municipal actors (cities, villages, regional county municipalities or others), Europe and especially Italy and France seem to have taken a head start in both reflecting on and implementing concrete solutions pertaining to the management of social times and work-life balance. More recently, in 2004, the Québec government invited municipalities to submit work-family projects; provincial incentives were aimed at engaging municipalities into action on this theme. The objective of this paper is thus to analyze the relevant municipal actions and to determine to what extent they have managed to incorporate this issue, and go beyond their traditional fields of intervention, such as leisure and transportation, which of course have some impact on families, but are not new in municipal activities.

Our aim was to determine how municipalities actually dealt with the challenge of a new responsibility (work-family) and the extent to which this has translated into concrete interventions on work-family balance issues. Our investigation shows that the municipalities under study achieve a number of actions designed to impact on work-family reconciliation, namely adjusting the schedule of municipal services to family needs. These actions appear somewhat limited in scope, and they do not feature however the cross-cutting outreach typical of time management and work-life policies found in certain

European cities. The difference may be explained. In the case of Quebec, municipalities are new actors in matters concerning family policy. In addition, municipalities appear to have a limited range of options in implementing cross-cutting actions on social times where the following issues are concerned: employment and labour, education and training, health and social services. Given the rising debate on work-family and work-life balance in North America over the past two decades and the increasing demands on states, provinces, municipalities and employers on the issue, it is important to evaluate the actions of the municipal actor. Again, while Quebec may appear to lag behind Italy and France (Rochman and Tremblay, 2011), the province seems to be a North American leader, at least from the review of the literature on the subject and from the data collected in the course of our investigation.

Methodology

The first step in our methodology included a detailed analysis of the database maintained by CAMF (municipal forum on municipal action for families) where the family policies of 108 municipalities were collected. We reviewed these policies and analyzed them according to a scheme including the main elements of municipal policy, that is seven categories of potential municipal action related to family issues, including work-family balance, and also analyzing whether the plans were more at the level of principles, or whether they included plans for action, and to what extent action had indeed been implemented. We then conducted an interview with a CAMF officer to identify the most wide-ranging policies for a more in-depth analysis with case studies of a more limited number of municipalities. We retained five municipalities for a more in-depth case study, including municipalities of various sizes but all being considered amongst the most innovative and advanced in the field of municipal family policy. We did a documentary research on each municipality and a questionnaire was prepared and submitted to the five municipalities. The survey covered the following topics: policy design and family needs (the collaboration and input of families in policy design), policy implementation, and involvement of other stakeholders at the municipal level. We later conducted semi-structured interviews with each municipal officer responsible for the family policy in the community; the main objective of the interviews was to obtain additional information on the actual implementation of the policy, especially with respect to work-family balance. We then analyzed the contents of questionnaires and interviews according to the same scheme, i.e. fields of intervention, as well as modalities and levels of planning and implementation.

Family Policy Models: Where Does Quebec Stand?

Let us first examine briefly the Provincial Family Policy in light of other similar models; this paper does not fully expose the major typologies found elsewhere (Hantrais and Letablier, 1995, 1996; Thévenon, 2008; Darchen and Tremblay, 2008) but the essential elements of these. The first model is based on non-intervention of the State or public actors or *laissez-faire*; the second focuses on *alternation* between work and family (withdrawal of women when they have young children); and lastly there is the *reconciliation* model (Hantrais and Letablier, 1995, 1996) which, as the word indicates, is based on policies favouring the best reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. This can imply

policies relating to working time, but also policies for daycare, better transportation services to facilitate work and family articulation, and the like. Thévenon (2008) identifies a fourth model, that of Southern Europe, which he distinguishes from the general *laissez-faire* model; this last model presents weak development of childcare and welfare policy and thus low female participation rates. It should be noted that the relation or articulation between work and family – or family policies, vary from one country or region to another. For example, northern Europe and southern Europe policies are clearly distinct (essentially reconciliation model in the North and *laissez-faire* in the South), and the situation is also quite different between the United States (*laissez-faire*) and Northern Europe. Policies also take on different shapes depending on the social, demographic and cultural contexts and on existing public policy (Tremblay, 2008a; Barrère and Tremblay, 2009a). Most countries have affinities with one model or another, including Quebec and Canada.

In the work-family reconciliation model, policy action aims at balancing the requirements of family life with employment constraints and allowing individuals, both men and women, to keep their jobs while assuming their family responsibilities. It facilitates family responsibilities and employment without having to relinquish either. The **reconciliation** model offers quality enhancements and includes a wider variety of public measures aimed at adjusting the work-family relation: highly developed and accessible public services such as daycare, exemplary work time measures, and paid and flexible parental leave. Municipalities can of course be involved in these various issues as an employer, but also as a source of services to residents, including transportation schedules, municipal sports and cultural activities schedules accessible to children and parent, and opening hours of services. In the reconciliation model, all the social actors, including the state, employers, unions as well as municipalities are called upon to address the work-family reconciliation challenge², and this is why it is interesting to evaluate the development of municipal family policies in Quebec, to determine to what extent they do support other levels of public intervention.

Although fully integrated to the North American context, Quebec's unique family policy borrows from typical European models (Dandurand and Kempeneers, 2002: 49; Tremblay, 2008a; Barrère and Tremblay, 2009b). Actually, in keeping with the typology established by Hantrais and Letablier (1996, 1995), Quebec policies are closer to a work-family reconciliation model that features support to daycare services and parental leave; the latter program is more developed than anywhere else in North America and includes a three to five week paid leave period for the father (Doucet and Tremblay, 2006). Following the introduction of a "cash for care" system whereby persons who stay home to care for their child are handed one hundred dollars (\$100,00) per month, Canada's family policy bears a resemblance to the work and family alternation model (Tremblay, 2008b). According to Gauthier (1998), the Quebec family policy takes its lead from the French model (consequential financial aid, pronatalist appeal, incentives toward the third child, substantial support for working mothers). Indeed, as mentioned by Kershaw (2002: 129), Québec represents an important departure from the policy path followed by English-Canada especially regarding early childhood education. At this later date, however, and with hindsight (Tremblay, 2008a, b), Quebec's family policy reminds of the Swedish model and more generally of the northern European programs where family

² For example in some northern European countries, municipal administrations are responsible for child day care.

policy is not based on some pronatalist objective but rather on a concern for gender equity: work-family reconciliation is supported and all social actors, including municipalities, are invited to bear out this objective. In Quebec, the acknowledgement of these issues by municipalities could entail a widening of the governance over work-family reconciliation involving all the social actors, which would mean a distinctive approach. Indeed we mention governance of work-family reconciliation in the sense that social actors (Barrère-Maurisson and Tremblay, 2009a, b) – and not just governments, would participate in and co-own the policy. This may also apply to public policies and to the public or collective management of work-family issues.

Before we begin with our analysis for work-family reconciliation issues in municipal policies, let us review the starting point of Quebec's Family Policy.

Origin of Municipal Family Policies in Quebec and Key Actors

In Quebec, the official implementation of an inclusive family policy dates back to the 1980s following a socio-political process involving actors and stakeholders from different horizons. While in France the family policy was state-defined and state-implemented, Quebec's measures and programs were defined and implemented with significant input from social actors. Compared to other North American societies, social movements in Quebec have always been extremely active advocates of the development and establishment of family policies such as daycare services (Marois, 2008) and the parental insurance plan (Giroux, 2008). Where the origin of European family policies is more often the result of central state action, in Quebec such policies result from social activism. In Europe, family policy has recently included themes like the management of social times, mainly in France and Italy but in northern European countries as well. In Quebec family advocacy may have had a bearing on the emergence of the municipal actor (Brais, 2005a). Under the impulse of the Federation of Family Unions and of the CAMF mentioned earlier, the role of municipalities was enhanced from the early 1990s as an institution able to partake of the living environment (Brais, 2005a). This improvement to Quebec's inclusive family policy came about in a context where organised labour and feminism played a significant role in claiming, among other things, parental leave and daycare services.

Municipal family policies are still green among the rest of family policies. Although they have a bearing on almost 80% of families in Quebec, it cannot be denied that they are unevenly developed (interview: JL, CAMF). It is our belief that municipal family policies result from the Federation's awareness-raising for family living environments and CAMF's autonomous drive since 2001 (Brais, 2005b: 219).³ It is indeed under the impulse of CAMF that the Quebec government invited municipalities to assume a family-oriented approach. At that time, between 1989 and 2002, the Quebec government had implemented sixty (60) municipal family policies with the support of CAMF. The implementation of these municipal family policies convinced the provincial government to take action at the municipal level (interview: JL, CAMF).

We may backtrack further to locate the municipal family policy initiative. Municipal family policies originate from the provincial government who, in the early 1990s, wanted to see regional and municipal partners develop some form of action concerning

³ Until 2001, the CAMF (Carrefour Action Municipale et Famille) was a permanent committee of the Federation. It is now an autonomous organisation.

work-family reconciliation (Brais, 2005b: 218). The new regional and municipal actors were thus invited to join other social actors in order to broaden both the involvement toward and the support of Quebec families. It should be noted that CAMF attends to and manages the development and the implementation of municipal family policies (Brais, 2005b: 219). Municipalities and regional county municipalities (MRC) who wish to implement a municipal family policy may take advantage of government subsidies and of the technical support provided by CAMF (Ministère de la Famille et Aînés, 2008). The financial assistance covers only part of the implementation or upgrading of a family policy and subsidies are proportional to the size of the municipality.⁴ The provincial government does not require that all municipalities develop family policies; in fact, no obligation is made to municipalities in this policy framework and the process must be initiated by the municipality. The government nevertheless follows up on the cities that have received financial assistance but there is yet no assessment of municipal family policies based on a formal methodology (interview: JL, CAMF). In 2008, the government reconfirmed the interest for these municipal family policies, redesigning the financial support program slightly and inviting all municipalities that have not done so to develop a policy, and those that have, to move forward with applications and innovations. We now turn to the origin of European time policies and MTOs (municipal time offices) since it is partly in reference to these experiences that the time issue was introduced in the debates on municipal family policies in Quebec (Rochman and Tremblay, 2011).

Origin of European Time Policies

The European reflection on the reconciliation of social times was brought about by the combination of several phenomena: the globalization of the economy, the trend towards individual lifestyles, the introduction and development of work time flexibility, the development of new types of mobility, changes in private life and family life, and modifications to the structure of free time (Brais, 2005b: 136). The origin of urban time policies is sometimes credited to Italy. The social construction of a social policy aimed at reconciling work time and family time begins in 1985, fuelled by feminist advocates whose initial objective was to balance work time and “life time” (Bonfiglioli, 1997; Vassalo, 2005): the time dimension was truly at the heart of the policies that were to ensue. It should be mentioned that most Southern European countries, and Italy in particular, have to this day been characterized by a durable lag in women’s labour market participation, the weakness of family welfare, the weak development of child care; in such a difficult context, they have developed original actions (Thévenon, 2008). For example, in 1990, the movement resulted in the implementation of a public policy which allowed mayors to set up municipal time offices (MTO) specifically for the harmonization of social times and to enhance both professional and family life (Vassalo, 2005: 118). It should be noted that in Italy, family policy is a municipal responsibility (Vassalo, 2005) and this explains why reconciliation is so actively pursued at the grassroots, local level.

Where Northern Europe is generally at the forefront of the social times reconciliation issue, Italy is nevertheless an exemplary figure in that respect. In many cities, services are

⁴ Details and particulars concerning municipal family policies in Québec are available online at: <http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Famille/aide-partenaires/municipalites-mrc/Pages/index.aspx> / (accessed August 2nd 2009).

scheduled to provide the citizens more control over the organization of their time with a resultant positive impact on their quality of life (Boulin, 1997: 16). Time policies of this nature are generally more mature in Europe than in America, and more so in France and Italy.⁵ Time policies are also reported in Spain (Barcelona), Germany and the Netherlands. They emerged almost everywhere in the early 1980s, driven in Italy by feminist movements in discourses on the quality of urban life and the necessity to rethink the schedules that govern work, services, transportation, culture and family, and in other countries, by various social actors (unions, women's groups, and others). In this respect, MTOs are viewed as coordination structures for time policies (Amorevole, 2001: 68). MTOs become consensus-building parties in time issues involving public and private actors (municipalities, schools, transport organisations, businesses).

It is worth noting that urban time policies should not overlap existing policies but cut through them horizontally. For example, where the public action of an MTO aims to extend the availability of or access to municipal services, its action also involves a qualitative improvement of public services (Amorevole, 2001: 68) and the MTO needs to work in collaboration with different municipal services. Time policies are not limited to action on business hours (availability and accessibility) in municipal services to tie in with the changing lifestyles of citizens; MTO action needs to also extend to mobility issues in order to curb urban congestion, air and noise pollution caused by the daily concentration of activities (Amorevole and Pozzi, 1999). In summary, European time policies mentioned as examples pursue three major objectives (Bonfiglioli, 2002: 56):

- enhancing the quality of everyday life for citizens through improved organization and fair distribution of time between productive work and family life;
- modernizing public administrations, simplifying the procedures and creating services to match social needs, demand and utilization;
- designing urban public spaces that promote social skills, networks and resident mobility.

Even in Quebec the work-family reconciliation theme is not entirely missing in the first generation of municipal family policies although only eleven out of the 50 policies analysed by Brais clearly identify this theme as an issue of concern (Brais, 2005b: 143). Open-mindedness may be observed in municipalities concerning a better arrangement of social times, but Brais (2005b: 144) argues that Quebec municipalities have no power in sectors like education, health and social services which are managed and governed by other authorities and/or jurisdictions. It must be added however that even in European countries, these various responsibilities are governed by different jurisdictions, so in our view, it is possible for municipalities to act in partnership with other levels, as they do on other issues. In Quebec, there nevertheless exists an undeniable intent of the government to act upon the work-family reconciliation issue, especially in terms of home care, workplace and life environment (Ministère de l'Emploi, Solidarité sociale et Famille, 2004). Our goal is thus to analyse how government incentives directed at recent family policies translate at the

⁵ Refer to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Fondation pour les conditions de travail de Dublin), and papers by Bonfiglioli or Boulin. In France, major cities and municipalities involved are Paris, Rennes, Belfort and Poitiers. In Italy, major cities involved are Bolzano, Milan, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Catania, Modena.

municipal level, keeping in mind, however, that municipal actors may need a few years to appropriate this new issue.

Family Policy and Work-Family Reconciliation in Quebec

Our review of the 108 policies available for analysis reveals that both the work-family challenge and the social times management issues are secondary considerations in today's municipal family policies (Table 1). Our analysis leads us to conclude that municipalities added a 'family' tag to their traditional areas of action (recreation, culture, safety). In the municipal family policy documents, it is clear that the work-family theme rarely translates into concrete action toward the organization of service scheduling as is the case in Italy. Work-family is dealt with in only 19% of the municipal family policies examined and only nine (9) municipalities developed concrete actions aimed at social times. Compared to the objectives pursued in Europe with municipal time offices and policies, the actions are not very numerous for the moment, but given the fact that these policies were introduced in 2004, there may be room for innovation in the future.

TABLE 1 Family policy focus in 108 Québec municipalities

Recreation Culture Community organizations	Land use planning: Housing Urban planning Environment Transportation	Public safety Health	Communication	Education	Socio- economic development	Work- family balance
103 mun. 95%	100 mun. (1) 93%	97 mun. 90%	61 mun. 56%	45 mun. 42%	27 mun. 25%	20 mun. (2) 19%

(1) Housing and urban planning are of concern in 94 municipalities, environment in 62 municipalities and transportation in 53 municipalities.

(2) It should be noted that in the survey 50% of municipalities indicate their intention to deal with social times in their mission plan, but in the documents we have found only 9 (out of 108).

Under the family policy heading, municipal intervention tends to favour the following: leisure and culture – supporting community organisations (95% of municipalities and cities take action), land use planning (93% take action), public safety and health (90% take action), communication (56%), education (42%), socio-economic development (25%) and last, work-family reconciliation (19%). The figures confirm that municipalities tend to remain within their traditional tasks or environment. This may be explained in part by the fact that work-family is something new to municipalities and is also considered a transversal issue that requires joint action: it is not an exclusively municipally regulated topic like zoning, police, playgrounds and community centres, on which municipalities can act directly, on their own.

Our review of the intervention topics listed in the existing municipal family policies clearly confirms that social times has yet to be included among municipal priorities. Nevertheless, work-family reconciliation is likely to be better understood in larger municipalities (De la Durantaye, 2005) although our analysis of the policies has identified no relevant dynamic or very innovative program to this day. Our review of the intervention topics in Quebec's municipal family policies confirms that many are multi-sectoral and horizontal in nature but that they presently concentrate on traditional sectors (housing, urban planning, leisure, culture, environment, transportation), leaving out the specific dimensions of social times and work-life issues. Our recent analysis appears to confirm what had been observed by Brais (2005b), that is that little has changed over the years on the social times and work-life issues and one may wonder whether municipalities, among political authorities, are well adapted to manage cross-cutting problems like work-family reconciliation. A good number of European cities nevertheless deal with these issues and it seems that the number that are doing so is growing.⁶ This has prompted us to explore the question and to analyze in more detail the cases of five (5) municipal family policies that seemed the most comprehensive in terms of work-family balance among the written documents surveyed. Our intent was to analyze five cases in more detail to determine whether municipalities succeed in fully supporting the part assigned to them in family policy or family support at the local level and we interviewed the persons responsible for these policies in order to get a better sense of the dynamics involved in the various municipalities.

As was mentioned above, the work-family topic was not totally absent from the first generation of municipal family policies (Brais, 2005b: 143), but it was not a driving issue on the municipal scene; our analysis of the more recent policies shows a similar situation (Rochman and Tremblay, 2010 a, b, c). How can the situation and actions of Quebec municipalities be understood? Our examination of five municipalities attempts to answer this question.

The Case of Five Quebec Municipalities: Ville De Laval, Sherbrooke, Quebec City, Longueuil and St. Julie

The five municipalities were selected with CAMF amongst the most innovative and active municipalities on family policy. However, we also wanted to have a diversity of sizes and situations. We thus selected three large municipalities (Québec City, as well as Laval and Longueuil, in the Montreal suburbs, where many families live), as well as an intermediate size regional city (Sherbrooke) and a small municipality (Ste-Julie)⁷. The family policies of the five selected cities are not very different from the 108 documents surveyed: the issue of work-life and social times is not a priority compared to access to leisure and culture, urban planning (housing, zoning, environment, transportation) or public health and safety.

⁶ See Rochman and Tremblay (2011) as well as the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Fondation pour les conditions de travail de Dublin), or papers by Bonfigliani or Boulin concerning Italy and France.

⁷ Our large municipalities have a population of: Quebec City (491,140), City of Laval (381,577), City of Longueuil (389,938), our intermediate municipality: City of Sherbrooke (150,751) and our small municipality: Sainte-Julie (30,000).

The documents we have examined hardly ever mention the work-family challenge by name, but we have at times encountered some elements connected to consensus-building about work schedules or municipal service hours (Ville de Laval, 2007; Ville de Longueuil, 2006; Ville de Québec, 2004; Ville de Sherbrooke, 2004; Ville de Sainte-Julie, 2003). First, we shall examine how the work-family issue is dealt with in the municipal policies under study and next, the interviews we have conducted will shed more light on the results and the dynamics on the issue.

St. Julie. In the case of St. Julie, the only reference to work-family reconciliation is found in an attempt to create a joint action mechanism with schools (Ville de Sainte-Julie, 2003: 6).

Interviews confirm that the work-family topic is hardly an issue in the family policy of this municipality; the family policy allowed a better coordination of the municipal service schedules but this adjustment of schedules to family needs was performed spontaneously, prior to the provincial incentives program aimed at developing family policies (Interview, Ville de Sainte-Julie). The officer in charge explains that additional efforts will be made to accommodate men's needs for parental leave and the participation of fathers to parental leave, following the new paid (3 to 5 weeks) parental leave⁸ for Quebec fathers (Interview, Ville de Sainte-Julie).⁹ The case of St. Julie shows how the work-family reconciliation topic per se is not the centre of attention in this municipality's family policy, although the issue is important. The City must cover a large portion of the costs involved in this policy and this can be a constraint on the measures to be implemented toward this type of family-oriented intervention. Consequently, it comes to no surprise that the municipality prefers to set its priorities on other issues in the family policy (Interview, Ville de Sainte-Julie).

Longueuil. In Longueuil, the program is more ambitious and a time policy results in cross-cutting measures. Longueuil's municipal policy focuses on topic 1, supporting families' everyday needs (the document states five fields for intervention), and addresses the synchronization required to manage the recurrent 'time zones' of family life. Two objectives are mentioned in the municipality's policy (Ville de Longueuil, 2006: 2):

Objective (1): to offer families better possibilities to access resources outside regular school schedules and calendar. The statement translates into the following action:

- Implement a standing joint action school board-municipal structure that includes diverse constituencies; to increase the availability of unsupervised recreation sites.

Objective (2): to support the child care network in their attempt to offer more flexibility and services to satisfy family needs. This statement translates into the following action:

- Enhance the relationship between the municipality and the child day care network.

These objectives with schools and daycare centres are significant and could lead to productive actions on social times, and the first is clearly in line with the types of actions found in European MTOs. In Longueuil, the interviews conducted reveal that actual

⁸ On this parental leave and the comparison with Canada, see Doucet et al. (2009).

⁹ Québec's new parental leave program provides a 3 to 5 week leave period specifically for fathers; so far it seems that participation is high, at about 80% in 2010. Fathers may share part of their parental leave and it seems, at least in the public sector, that they often take advantage of this possibility. This translates into a longer leave period and creates a new situation municipalities must deal with.

actions are few and no real municipal time office was established to deal with social times and work-life issues. The officer responsible for the municipal family policy nevertheless reports that an agreement was obtained with the STL (Longueuil Transit System) to ensure that the service responds to family needs in terms of routes and schedules (Interview, Ville de Longueuil). The schedules of the various municipal services have yet to be coordinated however (Interview, Ville de Longueuil). A consultation and co-ordination committee is envisaged to implement services designed for parents with non-standard working hours, as these are more and more numerous in the labour market, and with young families living in the suburbs.

So far, few measures have been implemented and actors have yet to overcome coordination hurdles before they can establish efficient family policies. Given that responsibilities are sometimes shared and the municipality is not the first respondent for day care services and school schedules, actors will need time to discuss these questions together. The context thus seems to be favourable for an approach based on the multi-sectoral governance model observed in other areas concerned with family policy (Barrère-Maurisson and Tremblay, 2008). For example, the same social actors are found in the advocacy and consensus-building coalitions of actors for measures like daycare services and parental leave programs. Consensus-building is time consuming but the process may yield measures that are customized to meet the needs of the various social actors (as was the case for child day care and parental leave). In Quebec, it seems that those services meet the needs of parents like nowhere else in America and the mobilization of social actors and the multisectorial governance approach observed in the province may well explain their success (Marois, 2008; Barrère-Maurisson and Tremblay, 2009 a,b). It will be interesting to see if the same approach will succeed with municipalities and municipal time offices (MTO) in the future.

Quebec City. In Quebec City, the policy document mentions how complex family life has become and responds with an objective aimed at designing services customized to family needs (Ville de Québec, 2004: 12). The transformation of social times is also an issue and the policy document mentions that cities must take this into account in the organisation of their services and activities, including in the working conditions of municipal employees (Ville de Québec, 2004: 13). Further, creating a living environment that reflects current family realities would require consensus-building among different actors, such as school boards, health and social service agencies, business and employers, third sector and community organisations (Ville de Québec, 2004: 22). In item 3.3, under “accommodating everyday family life”, the policy document acknowledges that there is a need for a better synchronisation of schedules that have an impact on everyday life (business hours, work schedules, transportation, school schedules, availability of health and social services, of daycare services, and leisure). No concrete action is proposed in the city’s action plan however (Ville de Québec, 2004: 24).

During the interview, we learned that a number of actions have been developed, for example the extension of telephone assistance hours in borough offices and the continuation of services during lunch time. The person responsible for the municipal family policy told us that an MTO project had been set aside because government priorities had changed. For example, where municipal services are now available during lunch time, an MTO would have helped in co-ordinating the university campus opening hours (Université Laval) in order to diminish rush hour traffic. With an MTO, the interest lies in the consensus-building among the actors and the goal is to design arrangements that ease

physical mobility and bring flexibility to social times, while easing work-life balance for all. The original idea of an MTO was set aside and for the time being, the thrust is toward integration of parental leave and daycare services (interview, Ville de Québec).

Sherbrooke. The intervention document published by the City of Sherbrooke mentions an objective aimed at improving family accessibility to municipal services and infrastructures; no mention is made of actions on work-life or social times (Ville de Sherbrooke, 2004). The case of Sherbrooke is similar to that of Quebec City where issues concerning schedules are left to the management of municipal services involved; there is nevertheless a willingness to tailor service schedules to parents' working schedules, school holidays and breaks (interview, Ville de Sherbrooke). An MTO was not established although it was expected to figure in the 2007 action plan in which arrangements would have been designed to accommodate young employees. As in Quebec City, collective agreements in Sherbrooke continue to set a premium on seniority and the idea of a municipal time office was set aside, because some felt these two issues might be in conflict. The person responsible for the municipal family policy reports some schedule arrangements for employees with children, as well as some support toward work-family-studies reconciliation, although this was not formally established as a program by the municipal administration (interview, Ville de Sherbrooke).

Ville de Laval. The policy document issued by Ville de Laval is also poor in its reference to work-family reconciliation; item 5 nevertheless mentions an intervention aimed at day care services which would require some consensus-building and the establishment of 'partnerships'. To this end, the City suggests the following actions: to support existing daycare services and to promote access to municipal services in general (Ville de Laval, 2007: 24). In the case at hand, the establishment of an MTO is seen as difficult because municipalities have less freedom of action than European cities according to the officer in charge of the municipal family policy, and Quebec municipalities would not have the resources to establish discussions with others agencies such as local community health service centres (provincial jurisdiction) and transportation agencies (paramunicipal). Again, the question of costs and consensus-building is raised, but in our view it is much more an issue of political will and desire to try to develop a consensus for actions. Municipalities may not have the same powers as European cities and may not intervene directly, but European cities do not have all powers in their hands either; Quebec municipalities must acknowledge and accommodate other actors in different jurisdictions and this appears to be complex. In Ville de Laval, municipal service hours have been extended but action or intervention on social times is curtailed because the sectors involved do not directly depend on the municipality (education and health are provincial jurisdictions). The municipality may not by itself proceed to rework social time issues in all sectors, especially where health and education are concerned. Further, the municipal jurisdiction is not vested with all the mandates required to take action toward a reconciliation of social times and each agency has its own field of intervention; this remark also applies to employment and social services, which might be called upon in a policy of MTO type (Interview, Ville de Laval).

With respect to municipal time offices and municipal family policies, it is worth mentioning that a genuine political willingness did exist in 2003 under the impulse of then Minister Béchard to transfer the relevant European experience to Quebec, but he has been moved to another Department, and his objectives of a "time office" or policy at the

municipal level have been abandoned since, other strategic objectives having been retained at the municipal level as well (Rochman and Tremblay, 2010 a,b,c).

Conclusion

While the Quebec government was hoping that municipalities and cities would take action to support families, our research has brought to light the fact that work-family balance is barely emerging in the relevant policies. In addition, this theme seldom translates into concrete actions because municipal entities feel they do not control all the required tools, do not have decisional power on the issues and therefore consider they are not expected to fully understand and work on the concept. One might wish to find here another case of the Quebec family policy ‘governance model’ – the like of the parental insurance plan and child care services which are based on consensus-building among social actors and stakeholders (Barrère-Maurisson and Tremblay, 2008; Tremblay, 2008a), and it may be the case in a few years, as many municipalities appear to be interested, but there is still much to be done to arrive at the same level of actors’ involvement.

The survey has brought to light the fact that municipalities are comfortable with rather traditional fields of intervention and that none has yet established some type of truly cross-cutting action pertaining to work-life and social times modeled on European cities’ MTOs. Given the relative importance of work-family issues in Québec lately, and contrary to expectations, no MTO or anything similar exists for the moment.

This municipal risk-adverse attitude may be understandable since managing the various fields related to social times (transportation, jobs, education, health) does not depend exclusively and directly on municipal instances while they do in certain European municipalities. In this respect, our study shows that municipalities are slow to deal with these issues either because they feel inadequate to oversee policies that require horizontal application in municipal services and in some cases with the collaboration of provincial departments (health, education, employment, transportation), or simply because they are provided insufficient resources by the State. However, the city of Gatineau organized a meeting in December 2008, to discuss this option, and many CRÉs (*Conseil régional des élus* – Regional Conference of Municipalities) have become quite active on this issue, so the work-life issue and MTO project are not completely absent from the discussions and may develop further in coming years, but perhaps more so at the regional (CRÉ) level than at the municipal level.

Municipalities may nevertheless have a better perception of the needs involved at the local level and it would certainly be desirable that municipalities occupy this field and appropriate the issues that relate to family concerns, including the articulation between professional activities and family obligations. While it is beyond question that the municipalities surveyed wish to adjust their service schedules to accommodate family needs, we were nevertheless unable to identify implemented MTOs, or any similar initiative, that would be comprehensive and cross-cutting on the work-life issue. It seems that the issue is too new an item in the municipal policy environment. In three of the five cases explored, an MTO had been planned but the idea was finally set aside. We found that this may be explained by the fact that the implementation of a cross-cutting MTO would be difficult to implement because of the dispersal of the responsibilities in the key sectors (employment, health, education, transportation) across government levels, including the

municipal, provincial and sometimes even federal level. At this point in time, an integrated approach – or consensus-building, has yet to be designed. It could be that for the time being the majority of municipalities prefer actions that they control entirely, since the implementation must be paid for by the municipalities alone. Concerning work-life and social times, one may hope that more complex measures will be implemented in a near future to accommodate the significant needs of parents and workers in this regard. Over recent months, a few CRÉ have shown some interest and some are starting to envisage actions in the field of transportation and working time. This will likely require a consensus between the actors and stakeholders because Quebec municipalities are not the only players likely to design and implement wide-ranging policies on work-family and social times.

At the same time, while individuals focus increasingly on their ‘local’ living environment, their neighbourhood and the services offered in this local milieu, municipalities or even administrative districts (in Montréal) could well host consensus-building and ‘multiparty governance’ on the issue of municipal family policy. Municipalities are no doubt closer to people’s needs than central state administrations (provincial or federal) and since the Quebec government has apparently abandoned the idea of a general Work-Family Balance Policy, the municipality – or some local steering body, could well be the ideal consensus-building forum on family policies and living environments. The interest of numerous municipalities – and 108 have already designed some form of municipal family policy – and some CRÉs, seems to substantiate the awareness of local elected representatives for this question.

Regarding the models of work-family relation we have mentioned earlier in this paper, it can be said that Quebec has clearly chosen the work-family reconciliation model, especially in view of the child care services available and the parental leave system (Tremblay, 2008a). However, from the point of view of municipal family policies, Quebec is closer to a *laissez faire* attitude since municipalities are under no obligation to provide such policy and that the contents are otherwise undefined. The European Union seems to have been more vocal on these issues and the approach which is typical of Italy and France seems to provide a better handle on time issues in the municipal family policies, although again, it is not all municipalities that have created MTOs and the movement appears to be slowing down in some regions¹⁰. Oil price increases as well as flu pandemics may well accelerate the process whereby employers begin to offer telework and a shorter 4-day work week in an attempt to curb both urban congestion and the costs incurred by commuting workers. Some municipalities already offer telework and a 4-day work week; some would even propose that a larger number of municipalities develop a consensus among businesses on their territory in order to promote measures beneficial not only to families, to employees and service users but that would also lead to a reduction in municipal infrastructure costs such as road upgrading and street repairs and transportation infrastructures, which would follow a reduction in traffic throughput and/or a better distribution of travel times (Bonfigliani, 1997).

In any case, our results highlight a certain contradiction, between a Quebec, «North American leader» in the development of family policies at the provincial level and a more traditional situation at the municipal level, at least when compared with the

¹⁰ We have conducted a few exploratory interviews with cities in Italy and it appears that the movement has somewhat slowed down. The idea still remains interesting and is gaining support in other European regions (Rochman and Tremblay, 2011, forthcoming)

Municipal Time Offices of Italy and France. It may of course be a matter of time. Indeed, Quebec municipal family policies are a recent subject matter (supported since 2001 by the Québec government) while they have been a concern in Italy since the 1980s. As could maybe have been expected, municipalities appear more active in areas corresponding to their domain of responsibility. From the point of view of a European policy of times, those involvements are considered quite traditional. However, we might consider that adapting their activities to new roles of fathers and mothers, responding to the needs of the families including leisure could be considered from a larger perspective as innovative. In any case, we look ahead to revisit the theme in a few years since it is expected to evolve and develop as municipalities are expected to play a more substantial role not only in the management of social times and work-family balance but in related environmental issues as well (infrastructures, roads, transportation). Since the government of Quebec renewed its call for municipal family policies in all municipalities in June 2008, it can be expected that the dossier will evolve in the coming years.

In any case, this research sheds some light on the complex processes by which family programs and measures are generated and built between different levels of government and their constituencies, sometimes with success, sometimes with difficulties. In spite of our conclusion on the limits and constraints encountered as well as the weak implementation of policies of time policies in Quebec municipalities, the work-family balance issue constitutes a social issue of great concern for contemporary men and women, for families, businesses and governments, and it is interesting to see the municipal and regional levels of government start to intervene in this most important issue. As such, this subject is important for local and regional development. Up until now, it had mainly been considered a theme for national or provincial intervention, but it is now clearly recognized as a field for municipal, local and regional action and policy. As mentioned above, it will be interesting to see if the multipartite model of governance characteristic of much policy development in Québec (Klein et al, 2009; Barrère-Maurisson and Tremblay, 2009a) will succeed with municipalities and municipal time offices (MTO) in the future.

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Interviews and surveys

- Interviews conducted with the officers in charge of the municipal family policy, Ville de Laval, Ville de Longueuil, Ville de Québec, Ville de Sainte-Julie, Ville de Sherbrooke. And the mayor of one city.
- Interview with Mr. Éric Banville and J. Lizée, Carrefour Action Municipale et Famille.

